

Kenyan athletes poised to chase glorious moments

Having groomed a pool of talented long distance runners, athletics' power-house Kenya will look for more glory at the Beijing Olympics in August.

The Kenyan Olympic Committee dished out about \$30,000 to help Athletics Kenya (AK) set up two training camps in late May, for their largest medal drive towards the Olympics Games in history.

'The athletes will practise together and get familiar with teamwork, especially in long-distance events, which I think would help Kenyan squad improve their group competitiveness,' David Okeyo, secretary-general of AK, told Xinhua.

Early this month, 37 athletes came through gruelling trials to make the Olympic squad. In the men's 5,000 metres, Edwin Cheruiyot Soi beat the star-studded field to clinch a ticket to Beijing by clocking 13:29.5 seconds.

Soi clocked 7:48.81 secs in the 3,000 m and 13:38.16 secs in the 5,000m to take two golds in the World Athletics finals last year.

In the men's 1,500m, Commonwealth Games champion Augustine Choge has recovered from injury just in time and led the field in the trial while 800m runner Wilfred Bungei, who grabbed gold at the World Indoor Championships held in Moscow in 2006, also gained a ticket to Beijing.

The most high-profile competition is the men's 3,000m steeplechase in which Kenyan runners have reaped eight golds in the past Olympics.

The trials for the steeplechase featured Sydney Olympics gold medallist Reuben Kosgei, All Africa Games champion Willy Komen and silver medallist Michael Kipyego was tight, but it was Athens Olympic champion Ezekiel Kemboi who emerged first.

'I am a champion athlete. My focus is to win gold in Beijing,' said Kemboi. Among the elite women's athletes are 800m runner Pamela Jelimo and the Osaka World Championships marathon winner Catherine Ndereba.

Jelimo clocked the best time in 11 years when he claimed the title in the Berlin Golden League meeting last month and won the national trial in 1:57.71secs.

'I am now ready to run for my country and confident that we shall win two medals,' Jelimo told local media after the trial.

The first batch of the Kenyan squad will leave for Beijing Aug 1 and the second group will depart two days later.

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